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The Richmond Area University Center: An Experiment in Cooperation

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The Richmond Area University Center: An Experiment in Cooperation

HERBERT W. K. FITZROY

THE MAJOR proportion of the deluge of college students we must expect during the next decade will not be educated by the present wealthy, better-known institutions, some of which have announced policies of remaining very much as they are. They will be educated by six hundred publicly controlled institutions and one thousand private, relatively small, modestly endowed colleges and universities scattered throughout the country. The problem of maintaining standards and adequately training the young people of America will devolve largely upon these latter institutions. Given unlimited funds this might not be too difficult, but they must accomplish this end with very limited resources. They will need every help they can be given, including the frequently neglected help they can give each other.

American colleges and universities, partly as a result of the struggle to survive within the culture and partly as a reflection of the culture itself, have become very competitive by nature. There has been competition for funds, for faculty members, for students, and, lamentably, for football players. Our institutions have developed individually and independently, and many of their very differences form the basis of their contribution to education. Under these circumstances the independent way has seemed the natural way, and cooperation has not been instinctive. The independent way has also been the easy way. Cooperation involves a certain amount of renunciation; self-curtailment is at times demanded; and the pursuit of self-interest must occasionally be abandoned. Yet, especially during recent years, the number of cooperative ventures undertaken by American institutions has been steadily increasing, and the rather elementary lesson reiterated, that several institutions can frequently do together what they cannot do alone. The crucial difference between the university center and cooperative projects organized to accomplish a specific limited objective is that the university center has a separate and continuing existence and provides the machinery not only for administering existing cooperative programs but also for inaugurating new ones. A cooperative dynamic is developed in which one cooperative program suggests another, until the administrators and faculty members of the affiliated institutions find themselves to a surprising degree thinking cooperatively.

Under the stimulus of a grant from the General Education Board, thirteen Virginia institutions, in the decade since 1946, have become affiliated to form the Richmond Area University Center.[1] Three of these institutions are approximately seventy miles from Richmond, two are fifty miles away, one is twenty-five miles, and one fifteen miles distant. The remaining six institutions are located

[1] College of William and Mary, General Assembly's Training School for Lay Workers, Hampden-Sydney College, Longwood College, Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia, Medical College of Virginia, Randolph-Macon College, Richmond Professional Institute of the College of William and Mary, Union Theological Seminary, University of Richmond, University of Virginia, Virginia State College, Virginia Union University.

in Richmond itself. If by some magic these thirteen educational organizations were consolidated, there would result a great institution with a faculty of about 1,900 members, a student body of approximately 21,000, an endowment of $40 million, and a library of well over two million books. It would have an annual budget of $16 million and would control properties worth over $50 million. It would be a rather impressive institution of higher learning, at any place, at any time. The purpose of the Richmond Area University Center may be roughly stated as that of bringing to each of the affiliated institutions the advantages which might accrue from such a consolidation, and of accomplishing this purpose in such a way that each institution retains all the admitted educational advantages inherent in the smaller, more intimate academic unit.

In the years before the Center was established, the institutions, for a variety of reasons, had developed unevenly in many fields. Some had well-planned programs of visiting scholars and lecturers; others seemed to rely mainly on retired alumni for contact with the outside world of thought. Some regularly allotted funds for faculty research; others made no provision for this important academic function. Some institutions were able to open courses in new academic fields; others year after year offered the same selection of courses, as though time stood still. Some provided reasonably for the purchase of new books; others provided very little. All the institutions recognized the desirability of strengthening themselves in all these areas, but were unable to do so because of a lack of funds. When the possibility of developing some of these programs cooperatively through the Center was presented, all the institutions were more than willing to enter the experiment. In the course of a decade the following cooperative programs have been developed.

Research

It would be generally agreed that at the time the Center was established significant research was being accomplished at only two of the affiliated institutions. This was due primarily to a lack of funds, but also to a lack of a tradition for research in the quiet college towns of Virginia. Although presidents accepted the college's responsibility to make a contribution to learning and recognized the importance of research as a stimulus to good teaching, there was too great a pressure on them to use their limited funds for more obvious purposes. Also, until Virginia faculty salaries were raised to something approaching the national level, expenditures for any other purpose had the color of luxury. Under these circumstances even faculty members who wanted to do research were reluctant to appeal to presidents for additional funds. This was especially true of the lower ranks of the faculty, although they frequently held the greatest promise.

The solution, therefore, was to establish a relatively simple procedure by which sound research grants could be made. Standard application forms were printed and committees on research were appointed on each campus, and the program was publicized. A Research Council was established at the Center, composed of representatives from each institution. The institutions agreed to match research grants to their own faculty members up to a fixed amount. This total varied from institution to institution according to the faculty potentials for research and presidential enlightenment. This latter factor, of course, was not unaffected by board-of-trustee enlightenment.

It was now possible for any faculty member, even a young instructor, who

felt the urge to engage in research to do so provided he could meet certain conditions. His application was approved by his local committee members who knew him and who could estimate him as a research investment. Some applications were eliminated or returned for more careful consideration at this point. Back-scratching and local faculty politics remained a factor, but only until the application was forwarded to the Research Council of the Center. By then the application was standing pretty much on its own. On the theory that government and industry were providing funds for the sciences and for technical research, the areas of research for Center grants were limited to the humanities and the social sciences.

Beginning as a trickle, applications for research grants steadily increased as the availability of funds became known and the procedures became familiar. This program soon became one of the strongest of the cooperative programs of the Center, and research projects were developed on every one of the campuses. In six years the Research Council approved 153 grants. These grants have aided in the publication of 43 books and 79 monographs. The books have already returned to the Research Council royalties of $2,722, which have been reinvested in further research.

Some of the grants were large enough to send seven faculty members abroad to complete research. Others provided for travel, or clerical help, or the purchase of microfilm. One archaeological expedition was financed. Institutional policy varied. Some made a few substantial grants, while others made small grants to a large number of faculty members. Institutions were able to hold out the possibility of subsidized research as an inducement to new instructors. Institutional imprints began to appear on books, and the number of papers read at meetings of learned societies by faculty members of the affiliated institutions increased. The largest allotment of funds in any one year to one institution was $7,500; the smallest was $500. It is not easy to evaluate fully a program of this sort, but to those who have followed it, the change in attitude among the affiliated institutions with regard to research has been revolutionary. Only a contrast between the present situation and the research picture before this program was organized will give any suggestion of its success.

Three conferences were held in Richmond in connection with the research program. The purpose of the first was to examine research possibilities in Virginia and to have explained the procedures by which the Richmond Area University Center research grants might be procured. The purpose of the second was to discuss "Factors Affecting Research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities." At the third—a full-day conference—recipients of grants made progress reports to appropriate sectional meetings and discussed some of the problems which they had encountered.

Visiting scholars

Despite modern highways, daily mails, the telephone and telegraph, and television, an unbelievable isolation is still possible in the small colleges of our American culture. Months may pass without significant contact with the academic world. This is good for neither faculty nor students. Among the institutions which were to become affiliated with the Center, the desirability of importing stimulating scholars was recognized. But the familiar "lack of funds" made adequate budgetary provision for such activity difficult.

There was a very good reason why, acting independently, our institutions had not established very impressive lecture programs. The cost of independently bringing a single lecturer from any dis-

tance with travel expenses, hospitality, and honorarium was on the average over $200. This was clearly more than most Virginia institutions could afford if anything close to a reasonable number of speakers was contemplated. To meet this situation, a cooperative plan was devised by which a distinguished scholar was invited to come to the area as the guest of the Center for a period of one or two weeks. A speaking program was set up for him which was sufficiently strenuous, but which placed him in Williamsburg with time to see the restored buildings, in Charlottesville with an opportunity to visit Monticello, and which involved pleasant driving over a large part of Virginia. Depending somewhat on the speaker and his topics, he was called upon to address convocations, to give lectures in going courses, to talk before especially invited audiences, frequently including local townspeople, or to confer with members of faculties or interested students. These invitations seemed to be attractive to the speaker, especially if they brought him to Virginia in the spring. All the costs were then totaled and prorated among the institutions according to how much use each had made of the speaker. At first, because the program was novel and patterns of procedure had to be changed or newly devised, the program was wholly subsidized. Gradually the institutions assumed the costs of about two-thirds of the program. In no case where a speaker has been used by two or more institutions has the cost per speaker amounted to more than $60 for each institution. At this rate even the poorest of our institutions could afford a fairly impressive program of distinguished outside lectures.

The Visiting Scholars Committee meets twice a year in Richmond to consider suggestions. Each member brings with him recommendations which he has solicited from his own faculty. This preliminary search is invaluable because the result represents the pooled information of more than 1,900 faculty members who at conferences and meetings of learned societies, from colleagues on other campuses, and from a great variety of sources have discovered that certain foreign scholars will be visiting America, or that scholars on the West Coast plan an eastern trip, or that a not too well-known professor who has preferred teaching to writing is a stimulating and provocative speaker with an irresistible knack for developing enthusiasm for his subject. An effort is also made to include a number of promising young scholars, lest students considering the academic life think of it only in terms of physical frailty and hoary locks. A number of women scholars are also deliberately included. There were also frequent requests from the affiliated institutions for lectures by faculty members from other Center-affiliated institutions. This cross-fertilization not only enhanced the reputation of the visiting lecturer, but helped to diminish some of the stupid and unworthy prejudices likely to exist between the best of institutions.

Under this program 142 scholars have given 705 lectures. They have come from all over the world and from every major university in this country. At present negotiations are being conducted with several of the larger lecture bureaus to bring in a number of "name" lecturers and public officials at a saving of about half the cost of a single, separately arranged lecture, provided the Center agrees to make the scheduling arrangements for a minimum of ten lectures in the area and supply local transportation. Three institutions are working through the Center to use the same approach in arranging for musical programs.

In a number of instances where a scholar offered a single topic of a highly

specialized nature, or where time permitted but a single lecture in Virginia, evening lectures were planned at Glasgow House, the Center headquarters in Richmond. All faculty members of the affiliated institutions in the speaker's academic field were invited to attend. Where possible, the invitation lists were extended to include the other educational institutions in Virginia as well as interested citizens in Richmond. The topics at these Glasgow House lectures were usually somewhat provocative. A tradition developed for relatively short, direct addresses followed by relentless and uninhibited discussion. To facilitate this discussion the audiences were kept small, the average numbering about sixty. These meetings were followed by informal receptions where controversy continued over the coffee cups and where the faculty members had an opportunity to discuss with each other the usual academic concerns.

Cooperative professors

Among the problems which must be met by the small liberal arts college as it faces educational competition with larger and better-endowed institutions are those of offering its students an adequately broad choice of courses and of providing instruction at an advanced level where the number of students is likely to be very small. An examination of the catalogues of our institutions made these curricular gaps apparent. To meet this situation, a program of cooperative professors was developed. This program was based on the premise that, though a single institution might not have funds to hire a full-time instructor to teach the few students in a newly offered course, it could afford to pay a share of the salary of one instructor to be used cooperatively.

The first cooperative professor taught classes in speech and was shared by the University of Richmond, Randolph-Macon College, and the General Assembly's Training School for Lay Workers. At the end of two years, the nature of speech offerings at the University of Richmond had been broadened. Speech was added as a course in the curriculum at Randolph-Macon, and at the General Assembly's Training School not only was a department of speech established but speech was made a required subject for all students.

The second professorship was in contemporary French literature. A distinguished French scholar was shared by three institutions. This time the students commuted to Glasgow House to take advanced courses, and members of the French faculties attended a specially planned seminar. These cooperative professorships were followed by ones in orchestral music and in the history of art. At present, arrangements are being completed for cooperative professorships in higher mathematics and sociology.

The formal program of cooperative professors, which usually involved a subsidy, was limited to academic areas in which courses were not being offered by the institutions. Informally, there has been a parallel development in the steadily increased use by Center institutions of faculty members from other affiliated institutions. The Medical College of Virginia staffs its liberal arts program with teachers from the University of Richmond and Randolph-Macon College; Union Theological Seminary imports a philosopher from the University of Richmond; the University of Richmond shares its chairman of the art department with the Richmond Professional Institute of the College of William and Mary; the Richmond Professional Institute and the University of Virginia draw faculty members for their evening programs from all the other institutions. This exchange of teaching talent enriches the curricula of all of the institu-

tions through the efficient use of local ability. Though this exchange is not subsidized by Center funds, it has certainly been encouraged by the increased numbers of cooperative activities stemming from the Center. Effective cooperation follows from a state of mind as much as from anything else.

Adult education

At the time the Center was established, two of our institutions were conducting evening programs, as were the public schools of Richmond. These programs were competitive and overcast by a tendency to give any course for which there was a demand. Standards were spotty and teachers generally underpaid. There was early recognition that this was an area in which much could be accomplished cooperatively. A coordinator of adult education was procured and a survey made of all courses in continuing education being given in the area and of adult interest in courses that might be offered. A Center Council on Adult Education was organized to advise on the program and regular meetings of the directors of the separate programs were arranged. At these meetings common problems were discussed and, more significantly, a few differences reconciled. Some of the advantages of institutional concentration in separate academic fields soon became obvious, and there was a growing sense of the need for an over-all coherence in the program, especially in the area of liberal arts offerings.

The University of Richmond agreed to be responsible for all evening courses in business administration; the Richmond Professional Institute gave all professional courses and courses in the liberal arts not offered by the University of Virginia, whose extension division had been persuaded to enter the Richmond area; graduate teacher training was handled by the University of Virginia and Virginia State College; all courses below college level were taken over by the public school program; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts offered noncredit courses in art. In 1955 Richmond was made one of the test cities in the Fund for Adult Education's program for noncredit continuing liberal education, and this effort was included in the cooperative program of the Center. A consolidated catalogue listing over three hundred courses was issued and a common promotional campaign was planned. Partly as a result of the publicity campaigns, but primarily because of the improved quality of the over-all program, registrations have more than doubled since the cooperative program was established—from under 3,000 in 1950, to almost 7,000 in 1957.

One of the matters early discussed by the Council on Adult Education was the possibility of organizing the coordinated program in adult education so that a student might earn a bachelor's degree over a period of time, mainly on the basis of evening work. This raised the ancillary problem of mutual recognition of evening college credits by Center institutions, and the question of how and by whom the degree would be conferred. These difficulties were finally settled. It was agreed that a student might take courses for credit in any one of the coordinated programs and that the University of Richmond, since it could count such work as done in residence, should grant the degree.

At present, plans are being made for the declaration of "Adult Education Week" in the fall of 1957. All of the institutions have agreed on an opening date with a common period of registration. The Union Theological Seminary has made its radio station available not only for the promotion of this program, but also for the giving of lectures and courses during the year. A paper, the *Richmond Evening Student*, will be issued four times during the year to keep

students informed of the opportunities in the over-all program.

The Richmond Public Schools have indicated an intent to establish one of the largest high schools in the city as an adult education center (when it is supplanted in three years by a new and better-located school), under the aegis of the cooperative program. This would represent the fulfillment of the dream. As a result of dynamic cooperation Richmond would present a unified and comprehensive program of adult courses from grade-school level through graduate degrees. It would be possible to complete a college degree entirely in the evening. Technical courses would be included, but there would be substantial offerings in the noncredit liberal education area. The program would have the use of a radio station and would be housed in its own impressive downtown adult education center. And all of this will have been accomplished with a minimum expenditure of funds.

Library affairs

One of the first committees appointed after the Center was established was the Committee on Library Activities, because practically every one of the institutions had a "library problem." Most of the institutions needed new or larger library buildings. All of them were seeking increased funds to buy more books and to obtain larger staffs. The librarians without exception were harried and overworked. Had we the gift of prescience, we should have realized that this was not the place to begin our cooperation.

After a Coordinator of Library Affairs had been appointed, several careful studies were made and a number of important negative conclusions drawn. It was decided not to establish a "bibliographical center" in Richmond because of the proximity to the Library of Congress. It was decided not to establish a "deposit library" for little-used books and materials until all of our libraries were provided with reasonable space and had had an opportunity to weed out useless materials still on their shelves.

However, a *Union List of Periodicals* covering all of the libraries in the eastern part of Virginia was compiled and published. Arrangements were made for the microfilming of certain local newspapers. A gift of a research library of some 4,000 volumes was received and distributed to the institutions. Studies were made to determine the feasibility of establishing a university center press and a cooperative bookbindery. At present a committee made up of the librarians of all the Center institutions and the librarians of nine industrial research libraries in the area is reissuing the *Union List of Periodicals.*

Joint film library

A survey in 1950 indicated that Center institutions were spending approximately $7,500 annually on new films. These purchases were made independently and there was a good bit of duplication, especially in the acquisition of new scientific films. A committee was appointed and the matter was carefully examined. Discussion revealed that there was much variance in the manner in which institutions dealt with the film once it had been purchased. Some provided for the issue and care of the film through their libraries; others left the film in the hands of the professor who ordered it, to be used as and when he saw fit. It was recommended that the institutions purchase film jointly through a central film library, which would issue films on request, and where all films would be stored, rewound, and repaired. Adequate space was immediately available at Glasgow House. The plan fell, mainly because the possible savings from the amount of film then being purchased annually would not support the library, and no subsidy was in sight.

Since then a national corporation engaged in film production has indicated an interest in helping to set up a joint film library by providing a nucleus of film and a librarian who would be an expert in audio-visual aids. This librarian would begin by making a survey, not only of audio-visual aids presently being used, but also of instructors' skills and present attitudes with regard to the use of classroom aids. This would be a modest beginning, but the potential of growth would be present at a time when critical expansion of these facilities for increasing the usefulness of our teachers might be needed.

Survey of humanities courses

A complete survey of all courses in the humanities taught in the four-year colleges and universities in Virginia was made by the Center, preparatory to the 1952 meeting of the Virginia Humanities Conference. After study by committees of the conference a series of recommendations was made and given general distribution among those interested. The college-by-college comparison of what was being offered indicated that certain changes should be made. These matters move slowly, however, because patterns are not easily altered, especially where change might increase costs, and the drag of human inertia can be very great during a Virginia spring. Nonetheless, this approach evidently is sound because a similar survey has been requested for the social sciences.

Cooperative use of Union Theological Seminary radio station

Recently the Union Theological Seminary received as a memorial gift an extraordinarily well-equipped radio station. It immediately expressed its willingness to share the use of this station with Center institutions willing to establish lines to its studio. A Center committee consisting of representatives from the Union Theological Seminary, the University of Richmond, the Richmond Professional Institute, and the Richmond Public Library has been formed to make the necessary arrangements. When these have been completed, the University of Richmond and the Richmond Professional Institute will go on the air for the very small cost of a telephone line, since both institutions already possess studios. This is a perfect illustration not only of some of the imaginative possibilities of cooperation, but of the fact that, if an independent agency for cooperation exists, cooperation will take place.

Roster of Virginia-born professors

For decades Virginians preparing to enter the teaching profession have been taking their graduate degrees at Northern universities and the best of them have then, for a variety of reasons not entirely unconnected with higher Northern salary scales, frequently remained in the North. The Center in an attempt partially to redeem this loss is drafting a roster of native Virginians who are full professors at institutions outside the state. This project is grounded on the assumption that as all good Parisians want to return to Paris, so all good Virginians want to return to Virginia. It has its academic justification in the fact that a great many institutions retire faculty members at sixty-five, an age when many professors are at the very peak of their usefulness as teachers.

This arrangement will be a boon to all concerned. The professors will get back to Virginia and will have the satisfaction of knowing they are helping to solve the state's serious teacher-shortage problem. They will also have the satisfaction of extending their years of teaching usefulness. The institutions will add to their faculties distinguished scholars and outstanding teachers and, because these retired professors will be enjoying comfortable pensions from Northern endow-

ments, their salary requirements may be expected to be somewhat moderate. This is the type of broad survey that a single institution would not be likely to undertake but which can be very useful and which is naturally within the province of a cooperative agency such as the Center.

Area calendar of events

A complaint frequently heard from faculty members is that they did not know of an important academic event at another Center institution. To remedy this matter the Center will issue a Calendar of Events five times annually. All Center affairs and schedules will be announced, as well as public lectures, theatrical performances, debates, faculty honors, and events of interest taking place at each of the Center institutions. Time and again it has been noted that the mere publication of what one or several institutions were doing has made it easier for those interested to bring about desired changes on their own campuses.

THESE are the cooperative programs in which the institutions affiliated with the Center are presently engaged. Some of them have become completely self-supporting. Others have demonstrated their value and have been approved in principle, but depend for their success on a larger total expenditure by the institutions than is presently the case in order to assure the savings necessary to make such programs self-sustaining. Other accepted programs, such as the research program, by their very nature will never be self-supporting. For these the center will always have to rely on outside help, but several small institutions organized to contribute such help and administer it effectively are much more likely to attract support than each would if making its appeal alone. Finally, there are the programs on the experimental edge. As an illustration of this type of program a Center Committee on a Nuclear Reactor has just been appointed to consider the feasibility of the joint purchase and operation of an atomic reactor by five institutions in the immediate Richmond area. These are not wealthy institutions and, by standards in other sections of the country, rather meagerly endowed. However, with some help on the original purchase and by sharing the cost of operation, the use of a reactor for the training of their advanced students is a distinct possibility. Programs such as this latter are perhaps the greatest justification for a university center, because here the single institution, especially the smaller institution, acting with others will venture and make beginnings that it might not otherwise even consider. These experimental programs will always require subsidy, but no grants made by foundations will be more deserved, because one cooperative program will generate others, and in the resulting mesh of relationships the institutions will strengthen each other. This presumes, of course, an independent agency which has cooperation as its continuing concern and through which that cooperation may easily take place.